

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5298

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

COMMUSMACTHAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 10586

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, TH

SUBJECT: THE UNCERTAIN STATE OF THAI/PRC RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION: WE HAVE PATIENTLY WITHHELD OUR FIRE IN THE FACE OF THE RECENT SPATE OF ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ACCOMPANYING HEADLINES ON THAI-CHINA RELATIONS, HOPEFUL ALL THE WHILE THAT THE TARGET WOULD STAND STILL JUST LONG ENOUGH TO ALLOW OUR ANALYSIS TO CATCH UP. FINALLY, IN ANTICIPATION THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN WILL CONTINUE HIS WHIRLWIND PERFORMANCE AND NOT ACCOMMODATE US BY TWO CONSISTENT STATEMENTS IN SUCCESSION, WE WILL HEREIN TRY TO BRING TOGETHER THE PICTURE AS IT NOW STANDS.

1. CHATCHAI STATED IN HIS 19 MAY PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE HAD RECEIVED NOTICE FROM THE CHINESE THAT THE PRC WAS WILLING TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, AND THAT HE EXPECTED THIS FEAT TO BE CONSUMMATED BY SEPTEMBER 1975. CHATCHAI SAID
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MAY 26 THAT HE HAD INFORMED THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (ROC)

AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND, MA CHI-CHUANG, THAT HE SHOULD PREPARE HIS EMBASSY FOR DEPARTURE IN VIEW OF IMMINENT PRC ARRIVAL. CHATCHAI THEN SAID JUNE2 THAT HE WOULD TRAVEL TO PEKING ABOUT JULY 10 AND WOULD SIMULTANEOUSLY, WITH THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT, ANNOUNCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS.

2. CHATCHAI AGAIN SALLIED FORTH TO THE PRESS JUNE 3 AND STATED THAT HE WOULD BE GOING TO PEKING LATER THIS MONTH TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE CHINESE WERE AGREEABLE, CHATCHAI LAMELY STATED THAT THE PRC HAD ANNOUNCED EARLIER THAT IT WOULD ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH THAILAND AT ANY TIME. ALL THESE PROGNOSTICATIONS INTERSPERSED WITH CONFUSING DEVELOPMENTS SURROUNDING THE VISIT OF THE TWO VIETNAMESE DELEGATIONS. THE JUNE 2 STATEMENT INCLUDED A CURIOUS ATTACK ON "PRO-TAIWAN" ELEMENTS IN THE THAI GOVERNMENT WHO WERE OBSTRUCTING HIS EFFORTS FOR RAPPROCHEMENT WITH PEKING. THIS ATTACK INCLUDED AN OBSCURE REFERENCE TO CERTAIN THAI HAVING VISITED "PEITO" AND THEREBY SUCCUMBING TO RECIDIVIST TENDENCIES OF SYMPATHY TOWARD TAIWAN. MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE ROC EMBASSY ALSO ON JUNE 2, THE SPOKESMAN WAS DENYING THAT THE ROC HAD BEEN NOTIFIED OF ANY RTG DECISION TO RECOGNIZE CHINA, AND FURTHER STATING THAT, IN VIEW OF THE COMPLICATIONS, RECOGNITION DIDN'T SEEM POSSIBLE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. SENIOR OFFICERS OF THE ROC EMBASSY TOLD US AT THAT TIME THAT THEY HAD BEEN TOLD THE RTG CABINET HAD NOT APPROVED ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH PEKING.

3. THERE ARE AFTER ALL MAJOR PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN ADDRESSED: THE CHINESE HAVE EXPRESSED UNHAPPINESS WITH THE THAI STATE TRADING CORPORATION IN SPITE OF THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF THIS "SOCIALIST" INNOVATION, THE STATUS OF THE 300,000 PLUS CHINESE IN THAILAND, THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LAW, AND THE MATTER OF HOW TO HANDLE LARGE TAIWANESE-CONTROLLED INVESTMENTS IN THAILAND. ANY SOLUTION TO THESE PROBLEMS WHICH REQUIRES A COMPROMISE ON THE THAI SIDE (AND NATURALLY WILL BE THE CASE) WOULD REQUIRE ACTION BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY NOW IN RECESS UNTIL JUNE 24. CHATCHAI HAS STATED THAT A BILL WILL BE INTRODUCED TO ABOLISH THE STATE TRADING COMPANY, BUT WE HAVEN'T TO DATE NOTICED AN ASSEMBLY TENDENCY TOWARD RAPID OR DECISIVE ACTION ON COMPLICATED MATTERS. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. THIS IS NOW AN OLD AND FAMILIAR CHATCHAI PERFORMANCE, WHICH THE LOCAL PRESS AND THE BANGKOK DIPLOMATIC CORPS RECOGNIZE. THERE IS NEVERTHELESS TOO STRONG A TENDENCY TO DISCOUNT IT AS PURE SHOWMANSHIP.

5. CAN CHATCHAI GO TO PEKING AND, IGNORING ALL THE QUESTIONS WHICH STAND IN THE WAY OF RELATIONS, SIMPLY SIGN THE PAPER?

WE THINK HE PROBABLY WOULD LIKE TO DO JUST THAT, AND THERE IS A CERTAIN MANIC LOGIC TO IT. THE OPPOSITION TO THE HASTY ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITHIN THE THAI POLITICAL HIERARCHY IS CONSIDERABLE; THE REAL PROBLEMS REQUIRING NEGOTIATED SOLUTIONS ARE GORDIAN KNOTS OF PARTISAN INTERESTS. BUT CHATCHAI ALSO SEES THE REAL NEED FOR THE PEKING TIE IN THE FORM OF COUNTERBALANCING THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, AND POSSIBLY BALANCING INCREASED SOVIET PRESENCE, IF NOT INFLUENCE, IN BANGKOK. IF HE IS TO NAVIGATE HIS WAY AMONG THE DANGERS AND OBSTACLES AT ALL, PERHAPS A BOLD THRUST IS THE ONLY WAY TO DO IT, LEAVING ALL THE PETTY DETAILS FOR OTHERS TO STRAIGHTEN OUT. IT SEEMS TO US THEN THAT CHATCHAI IS USING HIS OWN WELL KNOWN PROCLIVITY FOR IMPULSIVE, ERRATIC DECISION MAKING AS A FOIL TO CONFOUND HIS OPPONENTS IN THE THAI ESTABLISHMENT AND ACHIEVE EARLY RELATIONS WITH PEKING. IT SEEMS CLEAR AT THIS READING THAT HE IS SUCCEEDING IN DISRUPTING ANY ORGANIZED, EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION TO HIS MOVES, AND WILL PROBABLY GET APPROVAL FROM IMPORTANT RTG DECISION-MAKING BODIES FOR THE PEKING TRIP AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION ANNOUNCEMENT WITH PEKING. LENDING A LITTLE WEIGHT TO THIS CHATCHAI APPROACH TO CHINA IS THE FACT THAT THAI AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED NATIONS ANAN PANYARACHUN WILL PROBABLY PRECEDE HIM TO PEKING FOR PRELIMINARY TALKS. ANAN'S PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE SHOULD ADD A WELCOME NOTE OF PROFESSIONAL CALM AND PACE TO THE MATTER, AND ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS FOR WORKING OUT ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE PRC.

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

KUALA LUMPUR 5695

AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
COMMUSMACHAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 BANGKOK 10586

6. HAVING SAID ALL THAT, WE HASTEN TO POINT OUT THAT IT REPRESENTS ONLY THE THAI SIDE OF THE MATTER. THE CHINESE PRESUMABLY HAVE SOME ITEMS THEY WISH TO CLARIFY. WHILE PEKING HAS NOT COMMENTED IN DETAIL, WE APPRECIATE THAT THE CHINESE ARE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS ANXIOUS TO RUSH INTO AN ANNOUNCEMENT THAN SOME OF THE THAI. WE SHOULD THEN EXPECT THE CHINESE TO EXPLOIT THIS DISPARITY IN AN ATTEMPT TO SECURE CONCESSIONS FROM THE THAI WHICH THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE BE RELUCTANT TO MAKE. ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH WILL TEND TO SLOW THE CHINESE DOWN IS THE UNSTABLE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND. CHATCHAI HAS STAKED HIS FUTURE ON THE POLICY OF QUICKLY IMPROVING THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEKING AND HANOI. HE MUST WALK THE NARROW LINE SEPARATING FAILURE OF THE TALKS FROM MAKING TOO MANY CONCESSIONS. HERE, AN OUTSIDE FACTOR MIGHT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE: THE CHINESE QUITE LIKELY PERCEIVE CHATCHAI AS HAVING FUTURE UTILITY FOR THEM. THEY HAVE CLEARLY DONE A COUPLE OF HEAVY FAVORS FOR HIM. FOR EXAMPLE THE SIMPLE ACT OF INVITING HIM TO PEKING LAST
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FEBRUARY. OBSERVERS OF CHATCHAI WILL RECALL THAT HE HAD PERCHED HIMSELF ON TOP OF A SHARP NAIL BY PREMATURELY AND UNILATERALLY ANNOUNCING HIS TRIP. PEKING EASED HIM OFF AND PROVIDED RED CARPET TREATMENT IN ADDITION. IT WOULD APPEAR TO BE IN PEKING'S BEST INTEREST TO ASSIST HIM IF IT WERE ABLE TO DO SO WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE CHINESE NEGOTIATING POSITION.

7. COMMENT: IF ALL THIS SOUNDS CONFUSING, THAT'S BECAUSE IT IS. THE MATTER COULD GO EITHER WAY AT THE LAST MINUTE AND ALL PARTIES ARE TAKING RISKY STANCES. WE JOIN THEM BY PREDICTING THAT IF CHATCHAI GOES TO PEKING IN JUNE OR JULY HE WILL SUCCEED IN EFFECTING WITH THE CHINESE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION; BUT WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT MORE COMPLETE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ATTENDENT EXCHANGES OF EMBASSIES, AND AGREEMENT ON THE KNOTTY PROBLEMS SEPARATING THE TWO SIDES, WILL NOT COME BEFORE THE FALL OR POSSIBLY THE END OF THE YEAR. THEN, HAVING DISPATCHED THE ROC EMBASSY, THE THAI WILL HAVE GONE SO FAR OUT ON A LIMB WITH PEKING THAT THEY WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO HOLD THEIR GROUND WITH THE CHINESE IN DETAILED SUBSTANTIVE NEGOTIATIONS. NEVER-THELESS, CHATCHAI WILL SUCCEED IN CLOTHING HIMSELF WITH THE

THREADS AND VEILS OF THE MAN WHO RECONCILED THAILAND WITH
CHINA. CHINA WILL OBTAIN ALL IT WISHES WITH REGARD TO
TRADE, STATUS OF OVERSEAS CHINESE, COMPLETE EXPULSION OF
THE ROC REPRESENTATIVES (OFFICIAL AND OTHERWISE), AND QUITE
POSSIBLY A POINT OR TWO WITH REGARD TO THE SOVIETS.
WHITEHOUSE

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